somewhere in the multiverse there's a you and me that works

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somewhere in the multiverse there's a you and me that works

by orphan_account

Summary

Bucky and Buck get the happy ending they deserved.

Or otherwise known as the version of events where John does go after Gale that night, and it does make all the difference.

Notes

Here she is, folks, the alternative ending to "if i was not myself and you were someone else" that was so highly requested. <3 I hope you guys enjoy! This takes place right after the end of chapter 5.

See the end of the work for more notes

When he opens them again, Gale is gone.

John, for once, doesn't go after him.

He didn't think it would change the events that would inevitably be taking place in some church in just a few weeks if he did.

(It might've.)

It does.

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John hurriedly goes to zip up his pants. He mutters a quick apology to Marge's friend, and then he's rushing past her after him.

He bursts onto the sidewalk and the ice cold air of the night burns his throat as he whips around in circles to see where he'd went. Two men whizz past him on bikes and their laughter rings out until they are too far away for John to hear it anymore. He's the only one outside the pub now. Head hung low defeatedly, he's about to make his way back inside to put on another painful performance of being happy with the circumstances when a strained voice comes from behind him.

"Why are you doin' this to me?"

John spins around to see Gale standing in the middle of the sidewalk looking at John like he had scorned him. John feels a flash of anger

and indignation at his words. “W-why am I doing this to *you?* Are you kidding?”

Gale’s accusing stare and look of contempt doesn’t waver. John doesn’t give him a chance to answer, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I didn’t *ask* you to look me the way you do or *touch* me the way you do when nobody’s watching, Gale!” He spits back and grits his teeth, all the anger he’s felt towards the younger man coming out now, waving his arms as he speaks. “Just for you to throw me to the damn side ’soon as your *wife-to-fucking-be* walks into the room.”

“Yes, you *did.”*

John’s about to ask what the literal fuck he’s talking about when Gale’s closes the distance between them in just two strides to give John a harsh shove backwards. He stumbles in shock, barely able to stay on his feet, but Gale keeps going.

“You *did!* W-with your stupid, irritatingly perfect *smile*, with your stupid *jokes* that were always too flirty, your stupid touch and the way it sets me on *fire!”* Gale bellows, following each accusation with a firm push. “You gave me your damn *name,* for cryin out loud! All these years makin’ me- makin’ me-“

He goes in to shove John again, but this time he stops right before the push. Gale can’t finish the sentence. Finishing the sentence would mean saying the word John knew Gale had been running from ever since John had almost died and said it himself. It was unlikely Gale Cleven would ever say it. John, delusional, tries to coax it out anyways.

“Makin’ you what, Gale?” He asks with a gentleness in his tone now.

Gale's shoulders drop from how tensed they'd been. His hands are sprawled across John's chest and he wonders if Gale can feel how wildly it's pounding through his jacket. "I don't want to feel this way, John. It's- it's wrong."

There's no anger in Buck's voice anymore. He looks lost and small. John lets a few moments pass before speaking as he digests his friend's words. It was the closest to an admission of requited feelings that Gale had ever given him.

It was more than he'd ever even dared to so much as dream he'd get.

"But you do," John says and at first it sounds like a question.

Gale screws his eyes shut and a single frustrated tear leaks out. "I *can't.*"

"But you *do*." John implores this time, like it's a fact, because he's not letting Gale run away from this again.

The younger man's hands fall from where they had still been placed on Bucky's chest with still-closed eyes that refuse to actually *look* at him. For a second, John thinks running away again is exactly what the bastard is going to do. *Coward,* he wants to say.

He's wrong.

"I do," Gale finally says. The confession is so quiet that it could almost be debated if he'd even said it at all. John's ears ring in reply and for a

second he wonders if he has a concussion, but he'd never fallen.

His voice comes out strangled now. It's like he's forgotten how to breathe.

"Then don't make me watch you marry her," he begs.

Gale laughs now, opening up his eyes to reveal how empty and hopeless they are.

"And if I don't marry her? What then, John?" He sputters like it's a joke, because to him it is. "Where would we *go?*There's no- there's no place for us!"

John didn't have an answer.

But he was willing to figure it out. He'd burn the entire world down and create a whole new one if it meant they could be together. Before he can say this, Gale delivers one last final blow.

"I wish you were a girl."

The words pierce through John like a bullet, because he'd never wished Gale to be anything else than he was. John would take him like this. He would love him like this.

But he wasn't enough for Gale in the way Gale had always been more than enough for him.

He never would be, he realized, and nothing he could say to his friend would change that.

In a few weeks, Gale Cleven was going to marry a woman and pretend this conversation had never happened. The fact that he'd ever thought different felt laughable now.

John didn't want to spend the rest of his life pretending along with him. He couldn't- not after this.

This time, it's John that walks away from Gale.

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John Egan resigns from his position as Gale Cleven's best man.

He tells Gale and Marge, he tells everybody, that it's because he's called been called back on orders.

Marge, devastated at the news, throws her arms around him when he breaks it to her. "Oh, that's awful, John!" She looks behind her to her future husband. "Isn't that just so awful, Gale?"

Gale says nothing. It feels like his eyes are staring directly into John's soul.

The two exchange a parting handshake before John leaves, and it's the first time he doesn't melt at Gale's touch.

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He's walking Meatball through his hometown on a random sunny summer day when he runs into an old acquaintance again. He stops paying attention for two seconds, and next thing he knows the damn husky has knocked over some poor fella just trying to carry his groceries.

"Ah hell, I'm sorry man," he says apologetically and extends a hand to the blond gathering his scattered items on the concrete. "He is just really, really fucking friendly. He doesn't mean it."

"It's alr-" The man taking his hand stops mid-sentence. John's gobsmacked.

It's not-Gale.

He supposed he never did bother to ask where the man had been from.

"Would you want to get dinner sometime?"

James Wilson says yes.

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Curt Biddick calls him the day of Gale's wedding. He'd been unable to make it as well. His reasons being real, unlike John's.

He remembers that it's the day of without Curt saying anything. He hadn't been able to forget it no matter how hard he'd tried. He does his best to avoid the subject over the phone.

Curt, never one to be graceful and having a lack of situational-awareness in a way that was most of the time endearing, doesn't pick up on this.

"I-I gotta say, Bucky. I don't understand ya'," the New Yorker tells him in a bewildered tone. "For as long as I've known ya', you've had it *bad* for Gale. And then when he reciprocates it ya' just… changed ya' mind?"

John feels his blood freeze in his veins. "What the hell are you talking about, Biddick?"

"You ignored his letters!" Curt cries, upset on Gale's behalf. "He waited by that door fuh' *days,* Bucky. One of the saddest things I eva' seen."

“What letters?”

Curt is suddenly very, very silent on the other end.

“Curt, *what letters?”*

“He-he wrote ya’ two of ‘em. I thought you got ‘em.”

There’s footsteps behind him. He turns slowly to find James standing in the doorway and worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

“James,” John says, already knowing what had happened without asking, “Where are the letters?”

James gestures sullenly for John to follow him to the office room.

Dearest Bucky,

I love you, too.

I cannot express enough how incredibly sorry I am that it took me so long to say it. I’m sure these words take you by shock, and even now I’m being a damn coward by writing them in a letter instead of telling you in person. I was never as daring as you with my feelings.

I have been raised my whole life to be a man of God. I thought loving a man would make me not honorable.

I now realize that an honorably lived life is worth nothing if it’s a life without you.

I have yearned for your presence, for your touch, ever since you walked away that day. I don't blame you for doing it.

But I now selfishly ask that if you'll still have me, I will call off the wedding. I love Marge, but no longer in the way I should.

Not the way I love you.

Yours,

Buck Cleven

Dear Bucky,

I understand why you did not reply to my last letter. I know that I have hurt you something awful. I was a fool. A cruel, heartless fool.

But I implore for you, I beg of you, to let me spend the rest of our lives making it up to you. I am to become a married man next week. Please, spare us both a life half-lived and marriages of convenience. Damn the military, damn the world, damn anything that says we can't be together.

Come find me, just like you did when we were both shot down and lost. How I wish I could turn back time and tell you that I loved you then, too.

Not saying it back has been one of the biggest mistakes of my life.

I anxiously await your reply.

Love always,

Buck Cleven

His hands tremble as his eyes sweep over the written words again and

again.

"Why?" He asks James without looking up, clutching the papers with white knuckles. "Why did you hide these from me?"

James is quiet before he softly speaks again. "I knew you would leave me to go after him."

John looks at him now with pity. He understands- he understands painfully so. "I love him," he says apologetically.

"I know," James replies.

"You're- you're a good man, James," John says with all the honesty and genuine-ness he has.

The other man smiles sadly. "Just not good enough."

"I'm sorry," John repeats.

He doesn't know what else to say.

For the second time, he walks away from James Wilson to follow after Gale.

He hustles back into the room and scoops the phone up with purpose.

“When is the wedding?” He demands.

“John… it’s in jus’ two hours.”

He hangs up the phone and is out the door in an instant. John knew that if Gale married Marge, that Gale wouldn’t divorce her. If he said I do at the altar, if he promised to love Marge in sickness and in health, he would stick by his words.

In just a few hours it really would be too late.

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Bucky can’t get ahold of *anybody*.

Everyone’s either at the wedding, or about to be.

Everybody except him.

He has an idea that he’s not sure will work, but he has to try.

“Colonel, boy do I have a favor to ask of you.” He exclaims once he spots the military man at the nearest military base. He, like the hopeless romantic he’d always been for Gale, jogs like a fool to keep up with the moving vehicle. The superior officer recognizes John Egan right away and eyes him wearily.

“Yes, Egan?”

“I need to borrow a jet.”

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When he finally gets to the church in Wyoming, the parking lot and streets are so crammed that he has to park almost a mile away.

He runs the entire distance.

He’s still too late.

The bells of the church are ringing, and all the guests are gathered outside now. Gale and Marge must have drove off.

“Bucky?”

He turns around to see Gale’s fiancé in her wedding dress behind him. Marge is easily the most beautiful bride he’s ever seen. He notices immediately that Gale is absent from her side.

He swallows nervously. His hands twitch at his sides with anticipation. “Where’s, um, where’s Buck?”

“He called it off before we even walked down the aisle.”

John’s jaw goes slack her words. Part of him had honestly not thought

that Gale would actually do it; especially since John had never responded to any of his letters. He gapes like a fish before he tries to school his expression, unsure of the reasoning Gale would've given.

"Where is he?" He tries to feign a normal amount of concern that a best friend would have in this situation.

"He went to look for *you,* John." Marge says with a sorrowful but knowing expression on her face.

He feels his entire body relax from how tense he'd been since getting those letters. He feels guilty for it, because Marge hadn't deserved this. She didn't deserve to be left on her wedding day.

"I'm sorry, Marge."

"It's not your fault." She gives him a small smile, and it's the first one he's ever seen from the bubbly woman that doesn't reach her eyes. A tear leaks down her cheek and she wipes it away with a perfectly, undoubtedly freshly manicured hand. "Go after him, please."

He can understand why Gale had loved her at one point.

He turns to leave, but he's stopped by Rosie's hand on his arm. The man has a determined look on his face. "Let me drive."

Rosie was one of the best pilots he knew. He was sure the man was one hell of a driver, too.

Crosby chimes in that he's coming as well. His chest swells with gratefulness at the support.

The three of them leave with haste.

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John doesn't beat Gale to the nearest airport that they had all assumed he'd be at. He uses, well, abuses his status as a Major in the airforce to get the airline to tell him if Gale had boarded a flight and how long ago.

He curses when they tell him that he had just missed him.

John boards the next earliest possible flight, and Rosie and Crosby cheer him on from the runway as he looks down at them cheekily from the window.

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The first place he looks for Gale is at his own house.

He doesn't know where else Gale would have gone looking for him, but he walks in to find the place eerily quiet and seemingly empty.

He has the sudden gut-wrenching thought that Gale had changed his mind.

And then the voice he'd missed so dearly called out from the kitchen.

He finds Gale seated at his dining table flipping through a newspaper and sipping on a cup of coffee casually. Meatball sits happily at his feet with a wagging tail.

His heart aches at the sight, and how Gale looked like he absolutely belonged there.

"What took ya so long?" Gale asks teasingly, just like he'd done at that damn Stalag.

John had never been more glad he'd made it out of that place alive than he was right now.

He realizes that he hadn't replied yet. He's still staring at his friend processing the fact that he's really *here.* Gale had really called off his wedding; and he'd called it off *for him.*

"Traffic," he says, hands hanging loosely at his sides.

Gale opens his mouth, probably to make some clever remark about *how the hell do you run into traffic in the air*, but John cuts him off with a kiss so enthusiastic it nearly knocks the smaller man out of the chair.

He had waited too damn long to wait another second to feel Gale's lips on his.

He feels Gale smile against his mouth and he leans up into the kiss from his seated position, threading his fingers through John's curls.

This kiss they finally share is sweet and slow and full of all the love they had felt and never been able to give each other.

The smile the two men give each other when they pull back is from ear to ear.

It was the best kiss either had ever had.

"I love you," Gale tells him in the most earnest tone he's ever heard the man use.

And it's all John had wanted to hear for a long, long time.

"I love you, too."

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John Egan and Gale Cleven get 16 wonderful years together.

And they would have, and should have, had many more.

But one day John Egan leaves to go to his job in the Pentagon, kisses Gale Cleven goodbye on their front doorstep, and he never comes home.

He is only 45. It's a heart attack.

It's not surprising that all the years of reckless behavior, drinking, and just never taking very good of himself as a young man in general eventually caught up to him, he muses in his final moments as he clutches at his chest. If only he'd known back then what a beautiful life with an even more beautiful man the future had held for him.

And now, he was going to leave that beautiful man alone.

He thinks back to the letter Gale had wrote him all those years ago after the war asking to spend the rest of their lives together. Selfishly, he feels lucky.

John had gotten to spend the rest of his life with Gale.

He thinks of Gale standing on their front porch eagerly waiting for him like he always did, and how this time he wouldn't be showing up. *I'm sorry,* he wishes he could tell him. *I would never leave you alone by choice.*

And then Gale Cleven is the last thought John Egan ever has.

Gale Cleven talks about John Egan up until the day he dies.

When he passes 42 years later at age 87, John's picture is still on his mantle. And just like Gale had been his, his last thought is still of John Egan, too, despite all the decades that had gone by since he'd last heard his voice.

Or that's what would've happened, if only John Egan had went after him that day.

In some multiverse, in some other life or time, this is how their story ends.

It's how it always should have ended.

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End Notes

This is technically a happy ending okay, or as much of one as I can write I love tragedies don't hurt me lol. John Egan in real life did die at 45, and the ending is based on that HEARTBREAKING masters of air podcast where Callum says:

"Cleven up until the day he died talked about Egan. There's that anecdote- he was the best man at his wedding, right? It's something like, 'it should've been me and you gettin' married,' or something like that. And they just loved each other."

The love letter borrows two lines off of the movie Callum Turner was in called "The Last Letter from your Lover" because I enjoyed them so much.

Leave me your thoughts on this ending vs the official below :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!